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"TALES OF THE JARVIS VALLEY"
A STUDY OF DYLAN THOMAS' EARLY FICTION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

Nancy C. Lyle Parrish

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

A distinguishing characteristic of Dylan Thomas' early fiction is his use of anatomical metaphor. One of Thomas' early biographers, Constantine FitzGibbon, observes that Thomas seemed of frail health when a child, and he further suggests that this ill health predisposed Thomas to be observant of, and sensitive to, his body as the means of experiencing life. Consonant with this predisposition was Thomas' later interest in sex, an interest which found a literary expression both in his poetry and in his short stories.

One of Thomas' letters suggests that sexuality is the genius of man's existence; hence, the body is a "bonebound island" which allows one to perceive and limits one's perception. The full range of life occurs within each person, and so, in actuality, one's body is a microcosm of experience. As a logical extension from this conclusion, Thomas develops a creative use of anatomical metaphor; that is, he uses sexuality and anatomical metaphor to stress the physical origins of experience. This emphasis is evident in some of Dylan Thomas' early poetry; it also provides a thematic consistency among some short stories from his Red Notebook, stories whose locus is the Jarvis Valley. For ease of discussion, I shall refer to these thematically-related stories as "Tales of the Jarvis Valley:" "The Enemies," "The Map of Love," "The Holy Six," "The Orchards," "The Tree," and "The Visitor."

Inherent in the experience of living is life's antithesis, death. In these early short stories, Thomas synthesizes these antitheses in an Hegelian-like dialectic and considers this relationship through themes that have been traditionally considered within myths. He combines this dialectic with his use of anatomical metaphor to create narratives which present symbolic action based upon a "geography of sex." This ostensibly geographical setting is the Jarvis Valley which, as mentioned previously, is the locus common to the "Tales of the Jarvis Valley."

"TALES OF THE JARVIS VALLEY"

A STUDY OF DYLAN THOMAS' EARLY FICTION

One of the characteristic features of Dylan Thomas' early fiction is his use of anatomical metaphor. Frequently he describes the body in geographical terms; likewise, he describes geography in anatomical terms. The metaphor seems to evolve from Thomas' contention that his body is a "bonebound island," and, as such, is a microcosm of experience. Thomas extends the anatomical theme in his early short stories, where he synthesizes the antitheses, life and death, in an Hegelian-like dialectic and considers their relationship through themes that have been traditionally considered within myths. He has, in essence, developed narratives which present symbolic action based upon a "geography of sex."

Some of the biographical origins and early literary expressions of this "geography of sex" prove instructive for the reader of Thomas' early stories. Constantine FitzGibbon's studies suggest that Thomas' ill health and interest in sex predisposed him to exploit the possibilities of the anatomical metaphor in his early writing. This anatomical interest is, indeed, confirmed by study of Thomas' early poetry, letters, and short stories. This paper will briefly examine some of the origins and expressions of Thomas' interest in anatomy in order to study the peculiar thematic consistency

apparent among some stories from Thomas' Red Notebook, stories whose locus is the fictional Jarvis Valley. Again, this paper considers Thomas' use of anatomical metaphor by tracing some of the biographical origins of Thomas' interest in anatomy, by analyzing how this interest is expressed in his early poetry, by examining some of his comments concerning his own perception of the anatomical metaphor, and by, finally, focusing study upon the "geography of sex" as expressed in "The Tales of the Jarvis Valley." For ease of discussion, I shall refer to these thematically-related stories as "Tales of the Jarvis Valley:" "The Enemies," "The Map of Love," "The Holy Six," "The Orchards," "The Tree," and "The Visitor."

Thomas' interest in anatomy and in sexuality has both a biographical background and a literary expression. In The Life of Dylan Thomas, Constantine FitzGibbon suggests that Thomas had an understandable predisposition to be aware of his body: "His health is a matter of the greatest importance if one would understand either his character or his poetry."[1] Thomas enjoyed either ill health or chronic hypochondria. In either case FitzGibbon concludes that a psychological climate was created:

> Sickness, too, spurs the imagination as shapes dissolve and the mountain becomes magic, while coarse and exciting and dangerous reality awaits outdoors. Knowledge is then irrelevant, indeed is not wanted, while feeling becomes all, feeling that can be expressed through words even before it can be fully expressed through the body,

> feelings not only of love, but also of fear, even the ultimate fear which is that of death roaring through the chapels (Life, p. 37).

FitzGibbon's observation supposes that ill health served to create in Thomas a potential for imagining and also a "fear, even the ultimate fear which is that of death . . ." (Life, p. 37). The surreal descriptions and ever-present tension between life and death in Thomas' early short stories and poetry do indeed seem to owe their impetus to Thomas' unusual susceptibility to disease and ill health. Poor health also early forced Thomas to contemplate the "terrain" of the body he possessed. He apparently studied the idea of physicality deeply, and his writing which will be discussed later in this paper confirms that he came to appreciate the body as the literal means for experiencing life.

In addition to his awareness of mortality and his appreciation of the body as the means of experiencing, Thomas developed a hearty pleasure in love and sex. For example, he was proud "to claim that he was sexually experienced at fifteen."[2] The joy that Thomas felt in sex is evidenced in stories such as "The Map of Love," where two youths explore the "terrain" of sex and find love together. One infers from this story that the body is a map for the study of life, a map that affords guidance and meaning to those who acknowledge the physical origins of experience. Thomas' use of anatomical metaphor complements his emphasis upon empirical, or experiential, knowledge.

Thomas gives sexuality a literary expression both in his poetry and in his short stories, and the two genre show similarities in theme and in style. For example, in the early 1930s, Thomas began recording some of the "Tales of the Jarvis Valley" in his Red Notebook. At that same time he wrote a poem which, Paul Ferris notes, displays his facile, fascinated use of anatomical metaphors:

> The subject was himself, the poet. He slid easily into a powerful sexual image of orgasm and its aftermath, of living and dying. The poem was not interested in white necks and raven hair. It was concerned exclusively with his own sexuality, his own nervous system:
>
> High on a hill,
> Straddle and soak,
> Out of the way of the eyes of men,
> Out of the way,
> Straddle her wrinkled knees
> Until the day's broken--
> Christ, let me write from the heart,
> War on the heart--
> Puff till the adder is,
> Breathe till the snake is home,
> Inch on the old thigh
> Till the bird has burst his shell,
> And the carnal stem that stood
> Blowing with the blood's ebb,
> Is fallen down
> To the ground.
>
> (1931; Ferris, p. 71)

Thomas doubtless enjoyed the shock produced in his readers by the indelicate choice of subject, but one still must acknowledge the serious artistic control of metaphors within the poem. The unsettling metaphors create a tension within the reader that suggests the developing tension of the orgasm. The words <u>adder</u> and <u>carnal</u> impose a serious tone upon the poem which forces the reader to review the poem for

the meaning of the metaphors. As Ferris suggests, orgasm here represents the height of physical pleasure, and its aftermath represents a kind of death. As the apogee of sexual intercourse orgasm becomes, in this context, a ritualistic act celebrating life, death, and, possibly, love. Hence, Thomas juxtaposes the "burst. . . shell" against the carnal stem "fallen down/To the ground," sets life in dialectic with death. The knowledge that death will follow life, however, does not deter the speaker from desiring a full life: "Breathe till the snake is home." The determination to enjoy the orgasm without worry of the inevitable fall "To the ground," death, is an affirmation that life and death are simply anatomical realities. Because the potential for procreation exists with orgasm, sexuality becomes an appropriate source for empirical knowledge. In this poem, the association of life with death is not so much acknowledged intellectually as it is known anatomically. The themes and style of this poem are also developed in the short stories which Thomas wrote during this time. As will be shown later, these stories extend the anatomical theme and metaphor by setting the narratives within a fictional Jarvis Valley, a place which literally embodies birth, sex, procreation, and death.

"A Process in The Weather of The Heart" shows the developing geographical metaphor:

> A process in the weather of the heart
> Turns damp to dry; the golden shot

Storms in the freezing tomb.
A weather in the quarter of the veins
Turns night to day; blood in their suns
Lights up the living worm.

A process in the eye forwarns
The bones of blindness; and the womb
Drives in a death as life leaks out.

A darkness in the weather of the eye
Is half its light; the fathomed sea
Breaks on unangled land.
The seed that makes a forest of the loin
Forks half its fruit; and half drops down,
Slow in a sleeping wind.
A weather in the flesh and bone
Is damp and dry; the quick and dead
Move like two ghosts before the eye.

A process in the weather of the world
Turns ghost to ghost; each mothered child
Sits in their double shade.
A process blows the moon into the sun,
Pulls down the shabby curtains of the skin;
And the heart gives up its dead.[3]

Phrases such as "blood in their suns" and "forest of the loin" create a more concrete, geographical setting of sexuality. The poem, however, is constructed around the words "process" and "weather," words which connote the dynamic condition of human life and which suggest a sort of life cycle based upon love. The drought that is "A process in the weather of the heart" implies a loss of love. In contrast, "A weather in the quarter of the veins/Turns night to day." That is, passions can change like the weather, and dry kindling--the arid heart--provides the best flame to light up the "living worm." Man, however, cannot be blind to his mortality, cannot forget that "the womb/Drives in a death as life leaks out" of it in the form of a young baby. The

"darkness in the weather of the eye" then seems to be man's inability to prevent death: he simply "forwarns/The bones of blindness." For that reason, life ("flesh and bone") "Is damp and dry." Love is possible, and death is inevitable: "the quick and dead/Move like two ghosts before the eye." As in the earlier poem, life and death are simply realities to be acknowledged, and that dynamic relationship between life and death is that "process in the weather of the world[that]/Turns ghost to ghost." One notes that the phrase "weather of the world" expands the context of the poem to encompass the general experience of mankind throughout time. Again, this expansion of context will become even more developed in some of the short stories to be discussed.

In this poem Thomas has attempted to make the style reinforce the theme. The sensuous metaphors reflect an interest in the physical nature of living. The sex act becomes an emblem of the paradoxical relationship between life and death; therefore, anatomy constitutes meaning, or, the body is a microcosm of experience.

However, one of the difficulties about Thomas' concept of the body as a microcosm of experience is the obscurity that, almost of necessity, attends his writing. Thomas himself conceded to Glyn Jones that his obscurity was "quite an unfashionable one, based, as it is, on a preconceived symbolism derived. . . from the cosmic significance of the human anatomy."[4] The novelty and difficulty of his style rests in the way he, in the original Latin sense of the

word, incorporates symbols and ideas. In a 1933 letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson, Thomas explains his motivation more specifically:

> What you call ugly in my poetry is, in reality, nothing but the strong stressing of the physical. Nearly all my images, coming, as they do, from my solid and fluid world of flesh and blood, are set out in terms of their progenitors. . . . The body, its appearance, death, and disease, is a fact, sure as the fact of a tree. It has its roots in the same earth as the tree. The greatest description I know of our own 'earthiness' is to be found in John Donne's Devotions, where he describes man as earth of the earth, his body earth, his hair a wild shrub growing out of the land. All thoughts and actions emanate from the body. Therefore the description of a thought or action--however abstruse it may be--can be beaten home by bringing it onto a physical level. Every idea, intuitive or intellectual, can be imaged and translated in terms of the body, its flesh, skin, blood, sinews, veins, glands, organs, cells, or senses.
>
> Through my small, bonebound island I have learnt all I know, experienced all, and sensed all. All I write is inseperable [sic] from the island. As much as possible, therefore, I employ scenery of the island to describe the scenery of my thoughts, the earthquake of the body to describe the earthquake of the heart (Letters, pp. 47-48).

Since, as Thomas contends, "All thoughts and actions emanate from the body," then the anatomical metaphor is a highly appropriate technique for describing perceptions.

The concept "Man," however, goes even further in assimilating the "bonebound island" concept. Man embodies super-personal meaning in that all men endure certain common aspects of living and dying. As the short stories will show, one of the shared experiences, sexuality, is the essential link between life and death. William York Tindall discusses

the potential of the "Man" metaphor when examining a line from one of Thomas' poems:

> "Man be my metaphor." From this condensation meanings leak out. Since man is the microcosm or little world and correspondences connect microcosm with macrocosm or big world, man can serve the poet as analogy for all things in heaven and earth.[5]

In the short stories, Thomas uses man, the sexual being, to emphasize the "earthiness" which Thomas found so attractive in Donne's writing. As he told Pamela Hansford Johnson, he wanted to return thoughts and actions to their natural level: the "physical level." Man, "as analogy for all things in heaven and earth," affirms the meaningfulness of physical existence. Thomas hints at this affirmation in another 1933 letter to Pamela Hansford Johnson:

> I . . . so passionately want to believe in the magic of this burning and bewildering universe, in the meaning and the power of symbols, in the miracle of myself & of all mortals. . . (Letters, p. 83).

Here Thomas seems to celebrate the miracle of existence; Man, the "bonebound island" is Thomas' way of perceiving meaning in the world. Hence, he celebrates the body as both instrument of perception and repository of meaning.

The material considered thus far leads to three central statements about Thomas' concept of anatomy. First, the body is man's instrument for experiencing and perceiving meaning. Second, sex is an emblem, representing man's experience of life and death. Third, all men share certain common experiences, and anatomy is an appropriate metaphor

for this shared experience. The six short stories that will now be studied derive their themes, in varying degrees, from these three conclusions. The narratives are based upon a "geography of sex" and take place in the environs of the Jarvis Valley. The tales are empirical in that the knowledge gained in each story is an experiential knowledge of sex or of the body. Thomas' stories, because they consider such themes as life and death, create a kind of personal mythology.[6] When read as a collection, the stories coincide with many of the interests of myth:

> . . . they [that is, myths] . . . attempt to explain the creation, divinity, and religion, to guess at the meaning of existence and death, to account for natural phenomena, and to chronicle the adventures of racial heroes.[7]

One may try to equate Jarvis with "racial heroes," but perhaps the more pertinent comment is that these stories coincide with mythic themes because they closely describe man's "weathers" and "processes." In these stories, sexuality is the genius abiding in man's condition, and so by studying the anatomical metaphor in these stories, one gains further insight into the meaning of man's existence.

One of the initial bonds between the six "Tales of the Jarvis Valley" is Thomas' Red Notebook, a copybook filled "with short stories by the time he was twenty."[8] The ten stories recorded in this copybook, in order, are: "The Tree," "Martha," "After The Fair," "The Enemies," "The Dress," "The Visitors," "The Burning Baby," "The Vest," "Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar," and a story which, according to

Donald Tritschler's study of the stories, "constitutes the central section of 'The Orchards,'" entitled "Anagram" (Tritschler, p. 34). Two other stories not included, but inventoried in the Red Notebook and of interest to this study, are "The Map of Love" and "The Holy Six."[9]

The "Tales of the Jarvis Valley" share another similarity: they all mention the character Jarvis or the Jarvis Valley. As will be shown later, the term and character Jarvis is associated with sexuality and so provides a thematic connection among the stories. Further, a 1934 letter from Thomas to Pamela Johnson records his effort to write a novel about the Jarvis Valley:

> My novel of the Jarvis valley is slower than ever. I have already scrapped two chapters of it. It is as ambitious as the Divine Comedy, with a chorus of deadly sins, anagrammatized as old gentlemen, with the incarnated figures of Love & Death, an Ulyssean page of thought from the minds of the two anagrammatical spinsters, Miss P. & Miss R. Sion-Rees, an Immaculate Conception, a baldheaded girl, a celestial tramp, a mock Christ, & the Holy Ghost (1934; Letters, p. 126).

Several of the phrases from the 1934 letter are developed in "The Tales of the Jarvis Valley." The "chorus of deadly sins, anagrammatized as old gentlemen" are The Holy Six in the story by that title. The carter in that story, Vole, has a name that is an anagram of the word love. However, the fool in "The Tree" might be more appropriately called the "incarnated" figure of love, the "mock Christ," or perhaps the "celestial tramp." One finds an "Immaculate Conception" in "The Holy Six" as well: the ghost-like Mr. Davies

claims to father the child of Mrs. Owen. Finally, one finds the "bald-headed girl" to be one of Jarvis' lovers in "The Map of Love." Though Thomas was actually never successful in completing such a novel, the mere fact that he considered such an idea invites one to study the Jarvis tales.

If one will accept Jarvis as a useful term, then the artistic similarities among these tales become even more comprehensible. The Jarvis valley operates as an anatomical metaphor and so establishes the ideas of both a "mythology of sex" and a "geography of sex." In addition, the figure Jarvis seems to be a god or hero of sexuality. If, as Stith Thompson concludes, "myth has to do with the gods and their actions, with creation, and with the general nature of the universe and of the earth,"[10] then old Jarvis is an appropriate representative for a world of experiential knowledge. Likewise, anatomical metaphors are appropriate techniques for describing the nature of the world.

As mentioned earlier, the six stories to be studied here are: "The Enemies," "The Map of Love," "The Holy Six," "The Orchards," "The Tree," and "The Visitor." When regrouped in this order, the stories form a natural narrative pattern, progressing from a creation/initiation story to a story about death. "The Enemies" is a suitable beginning for the tales, for it describes what Donald Tritschler calls "an infernal initiation" (Tritschler, p. 40): the entrance of the Reverend Mr. Davies into the Jarvis valley.

The "morning in the green acres of the Jarvis valley"[11] seems like the dawn of time in the garden of Eden. Mr. Owen, one of its two human tenants, remembers a time when "the valley had housed the cattle alone" (AST, p. 58), and even now his "small house with one storey"(AST, p. 58) is the only habitation within the limits of this Edenic valley. The very land embodies a sense of sensuality and mortality, a sense which is suggested in the comparison between the pregnant women in the village and their sensual likeness to the valley: "Life would go on in the veins, in the bones, the binding flesh, that had their seasons and their weathers even as the valley binding the house about with the flesh of the green grass" (AST, p. 59). Through this comparison, the weathers of the valley become associated with the anatomical terminology of birth and human life, an association which provides an appropriate setting for the initiation of Davies and for the conflict of the enemies.

Like Eden, the Jarvis valley has an Adam and an Eve: Mr. and Mrs. Owen. As his ancestor Adam did before him, Mr. Owen cares for the land. In him one senses an almost pagan physicality and joy in his labor; he tends a land where "the vegetable world roared under his feet" (AST, p. 58), and through his association with the land, he recognizes the implications of the concept mortality. On one hand he promotes the growth and fertility of the land:

> Multiply, multiply, he had said to the worms disturbed in their channelling, and had cut the

> brown worms in half so that the halves might breed and spread their life over the garden and go out, contaminating, into the fields and the bellies of the cattle (AST, p. 58).

On the other hand, he enforces death: he "strangled the weeds" (AST, p. 58). Yet he is not an antagonist of the land. On the contrary, life swirls wildly and naturally about him as he works: "the wind blew back the heads of the nearby grasses and made an oracle of each green mouth" (AST, p. 58). It is as though the land has become truly anthropomorphized, as though it has gained human sensation.

The valley binds "the house about with the flesh of the green grass"(AST, p. 59), and each attention of Mr. Owen is an operation upon that flesh: "Not only a mandrake screams; torn roots have their cries; each weed Mr. Owen pulled out of the ground screamed like a baby"(AST, p. 59). There is an overwhelming sense of breeding and birthing in the descriptions of the land, a sense reinforced by the description of the women bent over their steamy washtubs in the nearby village who feel "new knocking" life in their wombs (AST, p. 59). Sexuality, like some pagan deity, is the genius of the land.

The land, for Owen, is both personal and sensual in nature:

> Outside the window was the brown body of the earth, the green skin of the grass, and the breasts of the Jarvis hills; there was a wind that chilled the animal earth, and a sun that had drunk up the dews on the fields; there was creation sweating out of the pores of the trees; and the grains of sand on far-away seashores would be multiplying as the sea rolled over them. He felt the coarse foods on his

> tongue; there was a meaning in the rind of the meat, and a purpose in the lifting of food to mouth. He saw, with a sudden satisfaction, that Mrs. Owen's throat was bare (AST, p. 61).

Owen understands the land in bodily terms, and so he feels an identification with it that both nourishes and instructs him. His "sudden satisfaction" with Mrs. Owen's bare throat is a logical transition: the sexuality of the land and the sexuality of his wife are of a kind in his perceptions.

In contrast to her husband, Mrs. Owen appears as a druidic figure. Like Eve in the Christian myth, she is interested in knowledge. She consults her crystal and "the tea leaves in her cup at breakfast"(AST, p. 59) to observe Davies' entrance into the valley, and her crystal "ball, like an open grave, gave up its dead" to her (AST, p. 59). Her interests seem both metaphysical and sexual in nature. The metaphysical interest is manifested in her sense that "the old powers"(AST, pp. 61-62)are upon her. The "darkness gathering in her mind"(AST, p. 62) seems symbolic of the pagan character of the valley. She is not in direct contact with the valley as is Mr. Owen, but seems to be a fertility figure, a symbol of sexuality whose foil is the "ghost" (AST, p. 62) Mr. Davies, the symbol for an insipid Christian morality. Her darkness absorbs Davies' frail nature: "with all her strength she drew in the intangible light that moved around him" (AST, p. 62); that is, her pagan spirit seems stronger than his Christian strength. Mrs. Owen's sexual knowledge is suggested by her viewing of Davies in the

crystal: "If he walked any nearer he would fall into her lap"(AST, p. 59). His entrance into the valley parallels his foretold descent into her lap; the action connotes a sexual initiation.

As in Genesis, there is an intruder in the garden, paradoxically, a minister uncomfortable in this valley where "the trees walked like men"(AST, p. 59). Mr. Davies is more at home in the ethereal traditions of his Christian faith, and he senses the threat posed by the inhabitants of this valley: he feels like "a man sucked by a bird" (AST, p. 62). During the course of his visit with the Owens, Davies confesses that he has "loved the darkness where men of old had worshipped the dark invisible"(AST, p. 62), but in his old age he fears the pagan joy in fertility and mortality; he fears the elements of life: fertilization, creation, decay, death. The Owens realize that Davies "is frightened of the dark"(AST, p. 62), which is a fear of sexuality, and, in his mind, Mr. Owen states the fear specifically: "He is frightened of the worm in the earth, of the copulation in the tree, of the living grease in the soil"(AST, p. 62). The "ragged circle of light" (AST, p. 62) around Davies' head verifies that Davies is more ghost than man. His espousal of Christian morality and asceticism is a denial of the physical nature of man; it is an espousal of impotence.

There exists an obvious contrast between the enjoyment of the physical and the sterility of Christian morality. The young, virile Mr. Owen seems at home in the sensuous

Jarvis valley; Mr. Davies seems lost. This ground upon which Davies and the Owens meet constitutes the grounds upon which they conflict. "The brown body of the earth, the green skin of the grass, and the breasts of the Jarvis hills" (AST, p. 61) are both setting and subject. In "The Enemies" the opposition of ghost versus "dark mind and the gross dark body"(AST, p. 62) results in Davies feeling driven to his knees and reduced to fearful prayer "like an old god beset by his enemies"(AST, p. 62). He cannot summon aid from his remote God, for in the Jarvis valley, the physical facet of man's condition is the source of strength and significance.

"The Enemies," by suggesting that man's sexual being is the source of meaning and perception, operates as a myth. In describing physicality as meaningful life, it satisfies man's impulse to understand the origins of his existence. The anatomical metaphor, the implied comparison between man and his "bonebound island" develops subtly, for the emphasis of the story remains with the conflict of the enemies over the source of meaningful life. The second story in this myth sequence, however, extends the "bonebound island" concept by using geography in order to teach sexuality. As the title, "The Map of Love," suggests, the study of sexuality incomporates two interests of myth, Initiation and Quest, again within a sexual context. The conflict posed within this story explores beyond the theme of "The Enemies" to consider the generational response to sexuality: the

new generation learns from the old and then evaluates the information as experience directs. In this tale Sam Rib teaches two youths the clinical facts of sex, but the old hero Jarvis, sexual pleasure personified, teaches the significance of those facts from the "Map of Love."

Again, as in "The Enemies," the setting of the story integrates anatomy and geography. Two lovers in copulation are described as an island:

> Here dwell, said Sam Rib, the two-backed beasts. He pointed to his map of Love, a square of seas and islands and strange continents with a forest of darkness at each extremity. The two-backed island, on the line of the equator, went in like the sking of lupus to his touch, and the blood sea surrounding found a new motion in its waters (AST, p. 140).

Sam continues his lecture to describe the fertile nature of this island:

> Here seed, up the tide, broke on the boiling coasts; the sand grains multiplied; the seasons passed; summer, in a father's heat, went down to the autumn and the first pricks of winter, leaving the island shaping the four contrary winds out of its hollows.
>
> Here, said Sam Rib, digging his fingers in the hills of a little island, dwell the first beasts of love. And here the get of the first loves mixed, as he knew, with the grasses that oiled their green upgoings, with their own wind and sap nurtured the first rasp of love that never, until spring came, found the nerves' answer in the fellowing blades (AST, p. 140).

It is not by chance that both the island and its inhabitants are "two-backed"; the anatomical metaphor works so that setting and character are involved in love-making. The geography of the island is inextricably bound up in anatomy:

> Under the sea they [Beth Rib and Reuben] marked the channels, painted in skeleton, that linked the first beasts' island with the boggy lands. For shame of the half-liquid plants sprouting from the bog, the pen-drawn poisons seething in the grass, and the copulation in the second mud, the children blushed (AST, p. 140).

When the children enter the fields, they do not run down the hill, but rather down "the Jarvis flank"(AST, p. 143). In each of these descriptions, the geographical description incorporates an anatomical connotation, which, in turn, reinforces the theme of sexuality.

Two extensions of this metaphor may also be noted in the descriptions of weather and of mating in the land. The weathers seem to correspond to the human equivalent of passion or desire:

> Here, said Sam Rib, two weathers move. He traced with his finger the lightly drawn triangles of two winds, and the mouths of two cornered cherubs. The weathers moved in one direction. Singly they crawled over the abominations of the swamp, content in the shadow of their own rains and snowings, in the noise of their own sighs, and the pleasures of their own green achings. The weathers, like a girl and a boy, moved through the tossing world, the sea storm dragging under them, the clouds divided in many rages of movement as they stared on the raw wall of wind (AST, p. 140).

The last line of this description foreshadows the journey of desire that young Beth and Reuben make together. In addition, the passions of the weathers reinforce the view that this island is undeniably associated with sexuality:

> Here the grass mates, the green mates, the grains, said Sam Rib, and the dividing waters mate and are mated. The sun with the grass and the green, sand with water, and water with the green grass, these

> mate and are mated for the bearing and fostering of the globe (AST, p. 142).

The setting and title of the story, then, employ anatomical metaphor to again present the concept of man as a "bonebound island." With this metaphor as a background, the story opens with a classroom scene. Sam Rib teaches love-making as a science, hence the necessity of a map. He translates the physical progressions of love-making into geographical terms. As mentioned previously, the island of "the two-backed beasts" (AST, p. 140) is a pair of lovers in copulation. The touchable quality of the map, which "went in like the skin of lupus to his touch" (AST, p. 140), reinforces the physicality of the subject. The geographical metaphor extends even to the description of fertilization as a seed travelling "up the tide" and "breaking on the boiling coasts" (AST, p. 140). Even the passing seasons are described as sexual "weathers": summer is "in a father's heat;" it succumbs to aging (autumn) and impotency ("the first pricks of winter"); the island is left to give birth to spring, "shaping the four contrary winds out of its hollows womb"(AST, p. 140). The map shows with thoroughness the geography of sex.

Anatomy implies mortality, and so one notes that the "get" or offspring of "the first beasts of love"(AST, p. 140) eventually die and mingle "with the grasses that oiled their green upgoings"(AST, p. 140). In fact death does make continued life possible: lovers "with their own wind and sap

nurtured the first rasp of love that never, until spring came, found the nerves' answer in the fellowing blades (AST, p. 140). This frank acceptance of death recalls Mr. Owen's dual role as caretaker and executioner. In both stories the contact with death is a fact and not a fear.

The reminders of mortality, such as the skeleton "that linked the first beasts' island with the boggy lands" (AST, p. 140), are not pleasant instruction to the youths, and they blush. Their reason for blushing may be due to their revulsion that life is so grisly ("shame of the half-liquid plants sprouting from the bog"), or may be due to their naive embarrassment at witnessing "the copulation in the second mud," the decaying body of Adam providing "mud" or potential for the next generation (AST, p. 140). In either case, these "Ribs"--another phrase which suggests anatomy--take no comfort from the knowledge that they were derived from the side of Adam. Sam Rib's comments actually connote an emotional detachment from sexual relationships. He jokes about the weathers as being "synthetic prodigals," existing only on a map, and instructs them to return "to thy father's laboratory. . . and the fatted calf in a test-tube" (AST, pp. 140-141). The children are left to discover any significance in sexuality on their own.

The "twenty fields" (AST, p. 141) which the children explore denote the passage of time in their lives. The early fields are like a "place of wonder" to these naive young

people (AST, p. 141). As they enter these fields, they are reminded:

> Here was the first field wherein mad Jarvis, a hundred years before, had sown his seed in the belly of a bald-headed girl who had wandered out of a distant county and lain with him in the pains of love (AST, p. 141).

The youths' further exploration of the land, understandably, may be seen as a sexual quest. In the central field, shy and uncertain, they knock "at the back door"(AST, p. 141) of various homes to ask for guidance; they receive nothing but "ghostly admonishment"(AST, p. 141), a phrase which may bear some relation to "ghost" Davies' insipid morality. At any rate, the young people are left to acquire sexual awareness on their own, and the precedents set by "mad Jarvis" (AST, p. 141) become important in acquiring this awareness.

The entry of the children into the twentieth field signals the end of their quest, for the twentieth field borders on the sea, the nexus of freedom and sexuality. Here, the night arouses passion as would a "hand on thigh"(AST, p. 141). Initially, Beth and Reuben cannot swim freely. Mud--fear of mortality--hold Beth, and Reuben is "weed-bound" by the censure with which "the grey heads" of society have bound him (AST, p. 142):

> They floated down river as a current tugged at their legs, but they fought off the current and swam towards the still growing island. Then mud rose from the bed of the river and sucked at Beth's feet.

> Down river, down river, she called, struggling from the mud.
> Reuben, weed-bound, fought with the grey heads that fought his hands, and followed her back to the brink of the sea-going valley (AST, p. 142).

It is only when the children return a second time to the fields that Jarvis appears to provide verbal and tangible encouragement. He charges them, "Hold hard, the children of love"(AST, p. 144), and, by lying with different women in nearly every field, affirms the pleasure and freedom of sex. His lovers, "oracles" (AST, p. 145), reassure Beth and Reuben so that, as the youths swim up the river, they no longer hear the instructions of others:

> We, said they the lovers , are Jarvis, Jarvis under the hedge, in the arms of a woman, a green woman, a woman bald as a badger, on a nun's thigh.
> They counted the numbers of their loves before the children's ears. Beth Rib and Reuben heard the ten oracles, and shyly they surrendered. Over the remaining fields, to the whispers of the last ten lovers, to the voice of ageing sic Jarvis, grey-haired in the final shadows, they sped to Idris. The island shone, the water babbled, there was a gesture of the limbs in each wind's stroke denting the flat river. He took off her summer clothes, and she shaped her arms like a swan. The bare boy stood at her shoulder; and she turned and saw him dive into the ripples in her wake. Behind them her fathers' voices slipped out of sound (AST, p. 145).

The "new moon" (AST, p. 145) marks a new phase of life on the map of love, the joining of two lovers.

As stated earlier, "The Map of Love" uses geographical and anatomical metaphors to emphasize the strength of and

essence of the physical connections between all living things. Here, the children use a map as a guide to their journey, the map being a symbol for the instruction of the older generation. However, it is through Jarvis' encouragement and through their independent experience that they learn the physical and emotional significance of love-making. Because, as Annis Pratt observes, Thomas' "tales usually culminate in a sacrament or rite, an act of sexual release, or an archetypal vision,"[12] the youths' final sexual experience signifies a successful rite of passage.

Genesis, Initiation, and Quest are all elements of traditional mythic themes. In addition, most myths have attempted to account for the presence of Evil in the world. "The Holy Six" continues the narrative begun in "The Enemies" and addresses the problem of Evil. Specifically, the story attacks the lechery and false piety of six clergymen. These men embody the worst of emotional attitudes, as their anagrammatical names indicate: Mr. Stul (lust), Mr. Edger (greed), Mr. Vyne (envy), Mr. Rafe (fear), Mr. Lucytre (cruelty), and Mr. Stipe (spite).[13] The malignancy of these clergymen is posed as antithetical to the pagan fertility of the Owens, and their sterile, lustful desires contrast with the obviously fruitful growth in the Jarvis valley. These men have profaned the religious offices that they hold, and so their hypocrisy is more reprehensible than the pagan "darkness" to be found in the Jarvis valley.

Three main themes develop within the story: divergent attitudes toward sex, the opposition of piety and paganism, and the ironic comment made possible through parodies of Biblical stories. The Jarvis valley, again, is the testing ground for these conflicts, and, again, much of the irony of the story resides in the reversal of traditional valuations. The epithet, Holy Six, would suggest that these men are pious. However, as John Ackerman observes, "the various reactions of these characters towards sex. . . are. . . reactions dominated by lust, greed, envy, and fear."[14] They enjoy "the wicked streets"(AST, p. 126) frequented by prostitutes in ways that are unwholesome and not in keeping with their supposed piety. Naturally, they are strangers to the Jarvis valley, and the fields "groaned beneath them" (AST, p. 129). They can see the superficial "sanity of the trees"(AST, p. 128), but they cannot see the "madman in each tree"(AST, p. 128), the relationships that are bound up in the physical being of all things. They cannot perceive the organic, wholesome connections that mix man's "chemic blood" (AST, p. 128) with the dust of the soil:

> At the first signs of night they would step from the table, adjust their hats and smiles, and walk into the wicked streets. Where the women smiled under the lamps, and the promise of the old sickness stirred in the fingertips of the girls in the dark doorways, the Six would passidreaming, to the scrape of their boots on the pavement, of the women throughout the town smiling and doctoring love. To Mr. Stul the women drifted in a maze of hair, and touched him in a raw place. The women drifted around Mr. Edger. He caught

> them close to him, holding their misty limbs to his with no love or fire. The women moved again, with the grace of cats, edging down the darker alleys where Mr. Vyne, envious of their slant-eyed beauty, would scrape and bow. To Mr. Rafe, their beauties, washed in blood, were enemies of the fluttering eyes, and moved, in what image they would, full-breasted, furfooted, to a massacre of the flesh. He saw the red nails, and trembled. There was no purpose in the shaping wombs but the death of the flesh they shaped, and he shrank from the contact of death, and the male nerve was pulled alone. Tugging and tweaking, putting salt on the old love-cuts, Mr. Lucytre conducted an imaginary attack upon the maidenheads. Now here and now there he ripped the women, and, kissing them, he bit into their lips. Spitefully, Mr. Stipe watched him. Down fell the women on the sharp blade, and his heart smiled within him as they rose to dress their wounds.
>
> The holy life was a constant erection to these six gentlemen (AST, p. 126).

As these descriptions show, the Holy Six have only the most sordid of concepts concerning the meaning of human sexuality. Their intentions place them in a class lower than animals, for animals are not malicious and calculating as they are. Their assault on Miss Myfanwy is predictable as is their inability to perceive meaning in the Jarvis valley:

> They reached the top of the hill, and the Jarvis valley lay before them. Miss Myfanwy smelt the cloves in the grass, but Mr. Lucytre smelt only the dead birds. There were six vowels in the language of the branches. Old Vole[anagrammatized form of love] heard the leaves. Their sentimental voice, as they clung together, spoke of the season of the storks and the children under the bushes (AST, p. 129).

Mrs. Owen's role is juxtaposed to those of the six clergymen. Her pregnancy is a tangible mocking of their position:

> . . . she saw the Holy Six reflected as six solid stumps, the amputated limbs of the deadly man who rotted in her as she swayed before his eyes, before his twelve bright eyes and the power of the staring Six.
> . . . The Six stood in front of her and touched her craftily, like the old men with Susannah, and stared upon her where the unborn baby stirred manfully in the eighth month (AST, p. 130).

Through the course of the story, which develops through apocalyptic parodies of Biblical stories, Mrs. Owen evolves from a demonic figure into a pagan Virgin Mary. Her meaning as a character is, however, presented in that first question with which she draws the men to the Jarvis valley: "Do the holy gentlemen believe in ghosts?"(AST, p. 127). The question operates on three levels. Do these men believe, as pagans do, in the real existence of spirits? Do they believe in the Holy Ghost, the true spirit of their professed religion? Do they believe in the spirit of the organic principle of which she is the representative? The clergymen's lack of respect indicates that they have no such beliefs.

Given the hypocrisy of the clergymen, the parodies of Biblical stories associated with Mrs. Owen act in an ironic capacity to remind the church of its own instruction. Mrs. Owen, initially cast as Eve, is associated with "malignity . . . , a cloven foot, a fork, and a snake's sting"(AST,

p. 127). The snake allusion connects her with the Eden story as does her description in "The Enemies." Yet this Eve later assumes the role of the Virgin Mary, "all-sexed and nothing, intangible hermaphrodite riding the neuter dead"(AST, p. 131); she is called "the virgin. . . on a white ass"(AST, p. 133). It is ironic that this pagan woman should bear the healthy fruit which Christian morality ostensibly advocates. The "worm insiderhar" (AST, p. 132), her baby, is the symbol of her fertility: she is "generation-bellied"(AST, p. 131).

Davies becomes Mrs. Owen's spiritual mate and, through parody, her son, a Christ figure who washes the feet of "the six sins in mustard and water"(AST, p. 130). His insistence that he has fathered Mrs. Owen's child also seems to be an allusion to the Immaculate Conception, the wedding of spirit and flesh:

> Your child is my child, said Mr. Davies. The ghost in him had coupled with the virgin, the virgin ghost that all the great stirrings of her husband's love had left as whole as a flower in a cup of milk (AST, p. 134).

Davies' claim of fatherhood disturbs Mr. Owen very little, for he is interested in physical reality rather than in metaphysical unions:

> But Mr. Owen burst out laughing; he threw back his head, and laughed at the mating shadows, at the oil in the clear, glass bag of the lamp. That there could be seed, shuffling to the spring of heat, in the old man's glands. That there could be life in the ancient loins. Father of the jawbones of asses and the

> hair-thighed camel's fleas, Mr. Davies swayed before him in a mist of laughter. He could blow the old man up the sky with a puff of his lungs.
>
> He is your child, said Mrs. Owen.
>
> She smiled at the shadow between them, the eunuch shadow of a man that fitted between the curving of their shoulders.
>
> So Mr. Davies smiled again, knowing the shadow to be his. And Mr. Owen, caring for no shadow but that cast on his veins by the rising and setting of the blood, smiled at them both (AST, p. 134).

One notes that Davies' sexual impotence would parallel the church's inability to produce clergymen who are moral and sincere.

The trinity of Mrs. Owen, Mr. Owen, and Davies, then, is in opposition to the Holy Six. The trinity can produce living offspring; the six produce nothing and are, in fact, themselves grotesque productions masquerading as true offspring of Christian theology. Not even Davies' spiritual asceticism prevents him from perceiving the importance of the baby, "the deadly man who rotted in" Mrs. Owen (AST, p. 130). Sex, devoid of love and generation, is even more sterile an interest than is asceticism. Because the Holy Six have overlooked the organic connections between things, they have not really perceived the holiness or wholeness of life and death.

The search for wholeness or meaning in life has, in myth and legend, traditionally been represented as a Quest. "The Orchards" describes the search for poetic inspiration, which is a search for such meaning. Donald Tritschler

offers some insights into this search when describing the bibliographical background of the tale:

> Originally called "Mr. Tritas on the Roofs" (October '34), it became "Anagram," a phantasy about the artist and thereby an anagram of what he does. The name Tritas is itself an anagram, but in the Criterion version he was renamed Peter--the name Thomas used for the poet in "The Visitor"--and for the Map of Love collection he became the more obviously autobiographical Marlais.
>
> . . . Despite these changes, the story remains an anagram of the artist's struggle to unify his "three-cornered life," the worlds of life, death and his own vision.
>
> The burning apple orchards in his dream are his anagram of this life. The two scarecrows. . . are the tree of knowledge, that is associated with light, and the tree of life (and death), that stands in a circular shadow with crows on her shoulders (Tritschler, p. 51).

In the beginning of the story Marlais does appear as a poet who is unable to command his craft. Thomas often uses the tree as a symbol of "the word" (Tindall, p. 62), and so it is appropriate that Marlais is an "apple-farmer" (AST, p. 89) whose dreams are about flaming orchards:

> He had dreamed that a hundred orchards on the road to the sea village had broken into flame; and all the windless afternoon tongues of fire shot through the blossom. The birds had flown up as a small red cloud grew suddenly from each branch; but as night came down with the rising of the moon and the swinging-in of the mile-away sea, a wind blew out the fires and the birds returned. He was an apple-farmer in a dream that ended as it began: with the flesh-and-ghost hand of a woman pointing to the trees. She twined the fair and dark tails of her hair together, smiled over the apple fields to a sister figure who stood in a circular shadow by the walls of the vegetable garden; but the birds flew down on to her sister's shoulders, unafraid of the scarecrow face and the cross-wood nakedness

> under the rags. He gave the woman a kiss, and she kissed him back. Then the crows came down to her arms as she held him close; the beautiful scarecrow kissed him, pointing to the trees as the fires died.
>
> Marlais awoke that summer morning with his lips still wet from her kiss (AST, p. 89).

Marlais, however, finds himself unable to record his dream: "the sun stood victoriously at high noon over the dead story"(AST, p. 90). His words are merely "heartless characters"(AST, p. 90), and when he cries, "The word is too much with us"(AST, p. 91), he has altered the Wordsworthian phrase to express his frustration at his inability to write. Even the chimneys scorn him as "virgin" and "coward"(AST, p. 92); he has lived with words rather than with real sexual experience:

> There, in a chimney's shape, stood his bare, stone boy and the three blind gossips, blowing fire through their skulls, who huddled for warmth in all weathers (AST, p. 89).

> The bare boy's voice through a stone mouth, no longer smoking at this hour, rose up unanswerably: Who walks, mad among us, on the roofs, by my cold, brick-red side and the weathercock-frozen women, walks over This street, under the image of the Welsh summer heavens walks all night loverless, has two sister lovers ten towns away. Past the great stack forests to the left and the sea his lovers burn for him endlessly by a hundred orchards. The gossip' voices rose up unanswerably: Who walks by the stone virgins in our virgin Marlais, wind and fire, and the coward on the burning roofs (AST, p. 92).

Marlais is a coward because he merely fantasizes about his lovers; he is a virgin because he has no sexual experience. His quest, then, is to gain the experience he lacks.

One of the more suggestive passage in the story is a description of Marlais travelling "out of the tubercular valley onto a waste mountain" (AST, p. 94) that seethes like a hell on earth. "Hell in the packed globe" may also refer to the torment that exists at some time in each human "skull" (AST, p. 94). Here Marlais has an apocalyptic vision: "the devils from the horned acres" wish to make a funnel of the hill and pour a "manfull of dust into the garden"(AST, p. 94). The metaphorical allusion to Eden suggests that man was placed in Eden and also that his dust will return to the earth at his death; man's life has purpose and his death is a part of his life. As in Genesis, the serpent appears to reveal the forbidden knowledge:

> the serpent sets the tree alight, and the apple falls like a spark out of its skin, a tree leaps up; a scarecrow shines on the cross-boughs, and, by one in the sun, the new trees arise, making an orchard round the crucifix (AST, p. 94).

An allegory, the story could be paraphrased thus: the serpent's revelation forces Adam to leave Eden. From man's newly-acquired mortality spring both life and death. Christ's death on the tree signifies that meaning exists both in life and in death. In terms more consistent with the general tone of the story, however, one could interpret this scene simply as a vision of the significance of decay, death, and rebirth. Marlais understands the vision more in terms of resolving his sexual "flesh-and-ghost" fantasy (AST, p. 96).

"This eleventh valley in the seaward travel" (AST, p. 96) convinces Marlais that experience must be brought to his writing. He finally meets his lovers,

> And he who had dreamed that a hundred orchards had broken into flame saw suddenly then in the windless afternoon tongues of fire shoot through the blossom. The trees all around them kindled and crackled in the sun, the birds flew up as a small red cloud grew from each branch, the bark caught like gorse, the unborn, blazing apples whirled down devoured in a flash. The trees were fireworks and torches, smouldered out of the furnace of the fields into a burning arc, cast down their branded fruit like cinders on the charred roads and fields (AST, p. 96).

It is significant that Marlais' writing is not mentioned at all after he has his experience with the two lovers. Apparently the experience itself is sufficient and the tensions within him are resolved. His story now exists both in dream and in reality; it is both "flesh-and-ghost." Marlais had to overcome his virginity and cowardice in order to understand the meaning of his vision. He could not write about desire and experience until he himself had known it. His quest ends in success because he learns the crucial significance of physical experience.

The two sisters reflect the tensions between Marlais' dream and his waking dream and in the dichotomy of spirit and flesh. Thomas could have found a Celtic precedent for his dichotomous image in the Mabinogion, which records the description of "a tall tree: from roots to crown one half was aflame and the other green with leaves."[15] Jeffery Gantz explains the vertically-halved tree thus:

> the green leaves [are] symbolizing the rich and concrete beauty of the mortal world, the flames [are] symbolizing the flickering shadowy uncertainty of the otherworld, and the whole [is] emblematic of the tension and mystery which characterize all forms of Celtic art (Gantz, p. 9).

The girl and the scarecrow, through their association with the orchards, suggest the dialectic of life and death which was mentioned earlier. If one accepts a full pleasure in sexuality, one will also confront the reality of mortality. Life and death are closely related to one another, and the relationship is dialectical. As has been shown, life feeds upon death and decay; the children in "The Map of Love" saw this truth and blushed to acknowledge it. Life also begins dying as soon as it is conceived; the "deadly man" in Mrs. Owen's womb is not just a dangerous man but a dying man. Life finds its origins and meaning in experience; ignorance of that fact made Mr. Davies ill at ease in the Jarvis valley. There is, however, a value to experience. The Holy Six perverted the fertile potential of sexuality. Marlais had to leave his writing and his abstract theory in order to know the significance of experience. The image of the burning trees offers itself as a useful vehicle for discussion of the positive relationship between life and death; Marlais must experience both life and death, girl and scarecrow, in order to perceive the true meaning of sexuality. By loving them equally he shows an understanding of the fact that life and death coexist.

The story "The Tree" highlights the insight that Marlais gained by contrasting it with a different outcome. As did "The Orchards," "The Tree" presents a quest for meaning in life. By contrast this quest is marred by misunderstanding based upon a lack of experienced knowledge; a young boy worships delusion rather than truth.

Within the confines of a Jarvis valley estate there stand a tower and a tree. A boy, the young master of the house,

> knew the house from roof to cellar; he knew the irregular lawns and the gardener's shed where flowers burst out of their jars; but he could not find the key that opened the door of the tower (AST, p. 63).

The tower, a mystery to the lad, stands in contrast to the tree, about which the boy has been instructed by his gardener. The gardener, a John the Baptist figure, is the keeper of the garden and narrator of his own variety of Bible stories: "In the beginning, he would say, there was a tree"(AST, p. 63). The phrase parodies the gospel teaching that God was at the beginning of all life. The gardener found that

> his God grew up like a tree from the apple-shaped earth, giving bud to His children and letting His children be blown from their places by the breezes of winter. . . (AST, pp. 63-64).

He admonishes the boy to "Always pray to a tree. . . , thinking of Calvary and Eden"(AST, p. 66). The boy mistakes the gardener's meaning and later wrongly transfers upon the tree the "secrets"(AST, p. 67) which he believes to

exist in the stone tower. In "The Orchards" Marlais' "pencil tower" (AST, p. 91) symbolized his inability to write without experiential knowledge; likewise, this tower of stone seems to represent the knowledge that lacks an experiential basis. The tree represents life, but the young lad forces the alien meaning of the tower upon it.

The boy is certainly central in the conflict. He is a combination of apostle, judge, Judas, and Pilate. In his capacity of apostle, he actually is awed by the age and power of the tree, by the "woodlice" and the ""frozen arms of a woman," both symbols representing physical experience (AST, p. 65). However, his insistence that the tree in the garden is "the first tree of all"(AST, p. 66) combines with his disappointment that "there were no secrets"(AST, p. 68) in the tower and leads him to transfer his expectations to the tree. The Biblical parallel is to the Jews who imposed their preconceived notions of Messiah upon Christ. The boy, like Judas, made a judgment to prove that he was not mistaken in his expectations. He expected and welcomed the entrance of the idiot into the Jarvis Valley and, like Pilate, condemned him to death. These Biblical parodies reinforce the concept that the boy's beliefs are based upon legends rather than upon personal experience. His murder of the idiot represents the extreme perversion of the natural positive potential of the tree.

The idiot is a Christ figure whose innocence and gentleness cause people to pity, clothe, and feed him.

His harbinger, the gardener, has prepared his way poorly: upon entering the Jarvis valley, the idiot discovers a "desolation of the flowerbeds and the weeds that grew in profusion on the edges of the paths"(AST, p. 68), even though the gardener is in constant attendance:

> On Christmas morning the idiot walked into the garden. His hair was wet and his flaked and ragged shoes were thick with the dirt of the fields. Tired from the long journey from the Jarvis hills, and weak for the want of food, he sat down under the elder-tree where the gardener had rolled a log. Clasping his hands in front of him, he saw the desolation of the flower-beds and the weeds that grew in profusion on the edges of the paths. The tower stood up like a tree of stone and glass over the red eaves. He pulled his coat-collar round his neck as a fresh wind sprang up and struck the tree; he looked down at his hands and saw that they were praying. Then a fear of the garden came over him, the shrubs were his enemies, and the trees that made an avenue down to the gate lifted their arms in horror. The place was too high, peering down onto the tall hills; the place was too low, shivering up at the plumed shoulders of a new mountain. Here the wind was too wild, fuming about the silence, raising a Jewish voice out of the elder boughs; here the silence beat like a human heart. And as he sat under the cruel hills, he heard a voice that was in him cry out: Why did you bring me here? (AST, p. 69).

The garden is not Eden, the place of "the first tree of all" but Gethsemene. In this garden the boy crucifies the idiot in order to fulfill his Christian ritual.

The theme of "The Tree" seems to be developed indirectly. Thomas, through his parodies, ridicules the Christian mythology that relies so heavily upon stories transmitted from generation to generation. The stories

have become ends in themselves and so are actually delusions. They no longer derive from experiential knowledge, and, because they are misleading, result in the perversion of true, meaningful life.

The conflict within "The Tree" continues the supposition that philosophies and religions often divorce themselves from physical verities. Once such a divorce is effected, man finds it difficult to comprehend the true meaning of life and its appropriate connection with death. "The Visitor," the final story in this myth sequence, returns to the device of the anatomical metaphor in order to consider the meaning of death. "The Tree" presents the ultimate misunderstanding that must occur when man values abstractions over physical realities; Peter, in "The Visitor" does not see the value of physical existence because he believes that death negates meaning. In both instances life is valued out of context: in the first story, abstractions lead man to forget his origins in physicality; in the second story, ignorance leads man to forget death's role in mortality. Peter, initially, does not see that the dialectic of life and death is an affirmative relationship:

> His hands were weary, though all night they had lain over the sheets of his bed and he had moved them only to his mouth and his wild heart. The veins ran, unhealthily blue streams, into the white sea. Milk at his side steamed out of a chipped cup. He smelt the morning, and knew that cocks in the yard were putting back their heads and crowing at the sun. What were the sheets around him if not the covering sheets of the dead? What was the busy-voiced clock, sounding

> between photographs of mother and dead wife, if not the voice of an old enemy? Time was merciful enough to let the sun shine on his bed, and merciless to chime the sun away when night came over and even more he needed the red light and the clear heat (AST, p. 70).

Because he is dying, Peter forgets the value of living; he forgets that man tends constantly toward death, that dying is integrated into every moment of living.

By failing to place death in proper perspective to life, Peter forgets the meaning of his sexuality, of his physical existence. In "The Holy Six" the reference to Peter is disparaging because he is so short-sighted: he chooses to see "the statue of the tree and no ghost but his own" (AST, p. 127). He doesn't see that all life decays and dies; he sees only his own death. In "The Visitor" Peter complains that he is already dead and that his nurse Rhianon has "put in the clock"(AST, p. 70) to replace his heart. His complaint is typical among old people: he is too old and feeble to care whether he is hot, cold, noticed, or unnoticed, and so he simply marks time.

"The Orchards" instructs why Peter's poetry seems lifeless, like "a string of words stringed on a beanstick"(AST, p. 71). Peter, like Marlais, is no longer in touch withh physical experience. He cannot imagine the continuance of existence after his death: "He could not think that after the next night and its sleeping, life would sprout up again like a flower through a coffin's cracks"(AST, p. 71).

Therefore he concludes that death negates the value of living. Rhianon chides him, telling him that he will be healthy again one day and that people will say: "There walks the ghost of Peter, a poet, who was dead for years before they buried him"(AST, p. 71). Rhianon, however, is unable to change his attitude, and he chooses to see her as a mortician rather than a nurse: she is, to Peter, one of the women who washed and anointed Christ's body "after it had been taken off the tree"(AST, p. 73).

Callaghan is the figure who provides the revelation for Peter; he is the guide through the Inferno. Callaghan takes Peter to the Jarvis valley, "the naked valley"(AST, p. 75), where they find activity on a scale comparable to that of the valley activity in "The Enemies." Here, however, the focus is upon death, decay, and rebirth, rather than upon fertility alone:

> Now the worm and the death-beetle undid the fibres of the animal bones, worked at them brightly and minutely, and the weeds through the sockets and the flowers on the vanished breasts sprouted up with the colours of the dead life fresh on their leaves. And the blood that had flowed flowed over the ground, strengthening the blades of grass, fulfilling the wind-planted seeds in its course, into the mouth of the spring. Suddenly all the streams were red with blood, a score of winding veins all over the twenty fields, thick with their clotted pebbles (AST, p. 76).

Peter finally comprehends what Callaghan had earlier told him about never being truly naked: "There is a ribbon of blood tied in your hair. Do not be frightened. You have a cloth

of veins around your thighs (AST, p. 74). Peter then perceives that there is a vivifying relationship between life and death.

In the valley Peter sees that the moon hangs "on a navel-string from the dark"(AST, p. 75), and beneath it he witnesses the continuing activity of death, decay, fertilization, and, eventually, new life. W. Y. Tindally, in another context, explains such a realization:

> Life and death. . . are parts of a natural process that links man with what surrounds him, inner with outer, above with below. That there are correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm is no news at all; nor is it news that time and eternity rule apparent contraries and parallels, that creation and destruction are our kissing poles (Tindall, p. 48).

Peter has been able to see the entire cycle in context and has learned that life continues through death and decay and that it persists to create new life. Ironically, now that he has received this revelation, he dies: "Hold my hand, he said. And then: Why are you putting the sheet over my face?"(AST, p. 77).

The myth sequence of "The Tales of the Jarvis Valley" then seems complete. The stories, through various ways, offer some explanation of the concerns explored through myths: mans origins are traced to his sexuality; meaning is posited in experience; death is revealed as an integrated part of life. Within all of these stories the Jarvis valley has been a pervasive influence, a reminder of

physicality. Because of its anatomical symbolism, the valley functions as both the setting for the stories and one of the consistent elements that unites them in theme. The stories that cluster about it create anatomical answers to the questions traditionally considered within myths, myths being

> Anonymous stories having their roots in the primitive folk-beliefs of races or nations and presenting supernatural episodes as a means of interpreting natural events in an effort to make concrete and particular a special perception of man or a cosmic view (Thrall and Hibbard, p. 298).

The "Tales of the Jarvis Valley" are myths mainly in the sense that they strive "to make concrete and particular a special perception of man or a cosmic view." Thomas emphasizes the concrete and the sexual because he perceives man as a physical creature who is, perhaps, given too much to abstractions. Therefore man needs reorientation towards his physical being; given this realization, the use of anatomical metaphor seems particularly suited to these tales.

Thomas does, in addition, make some attempt to use "primitive folk-beliefs" and "supernatural episodes" in his writing. Within many of the stories he has assimilated Biblical stories and treated them as folk-beliefs in order to condemn abstract philosophy in religion. He attempts to use these beliefs through assuming the attitude of a mythopoeic poet, who

> attempts to return to the role of the prophet-seer by creating a myth which strikes resonant

> points in the minds of his readers and speaks with something of the authority of the old myths (Thrall and Hibbard, p. 299).

By using the authority of the old stories, Thomas creates a new symbolism based upon man as a "bonebound island."

The use of anatomical metaphor complements Thomas' effort to draw attention to sexuality, to anatomy, to physicality. The Jarvis valley exemplifies the idea that man's body is "the place where he lives" and the medium of his perceptions. The valley lives, dies, and reacts to the visitors within its boundaries. The experiences within the valley threaten some people and enlighten others, depending upon their ability to perceive the true origins of their existence. Whether the "bonebound island" is a curse, which the tales suggest it is not, or the essence of identity, it is the genius of all human activity. Thoughts, feelings, and sensations must travel through it. Thus, even Thomas' fascination with disease and death has a unique justification, for it represents an expressed interest in the affirmative, dialectical relationship between life and death--a whole concept of mortality.

Notes

[1] Constantine FitzGibbon, The Life of Dylan Thomas (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1965), p. 21. All subsequent mention of Life will refer to this book.

[2] Paul Ferris, Dylan Thomas: A Biography (New York: The Dial Press, 1977), p. 98. All subsequent mention of Ferris will refer to this book.

[3] Dylan Thomas, Collected Poems (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1956), pp. 6-7.

[4] Dylan Thomas, Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas. ed. Constantine FitzGibbon (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1966), p. 97, dated 1934. All subsequent mention of Letters will refer to this book.

[5] William York Tindall, A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), p. 58. All subsequent mention of Tindall will refer to this book.

[6] Annis Pratt, in Dylan Thomas' Early Prose: A Study in Creative Mythology (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), offers many insights into a Thomasian mythology. The psychological observations in this book inspired some of the organization and literary evaluations of this paper.

[7] F. T. Thrall and A. Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature (New York: Odyssey Press, 1936; 1960), pp. 298-299. All subsequent mention of Thrall and Hibbard will refer to this book.

[8] Donald Tritschler, "The Stories in Dylan Thomas' Red Notebook" Journal of Modern Literature, vol. 2, no. 1, September 1971, p. 33. All subsequent mention of Tritschler will refer to this article.

[9] The following is a list of the early publication dates of "The Tales of the Jarvis Valley":

"The Tree." Red Notebook, December 28, 1933. Adelphi (December 1934).

"The Enemies." Red Notebook, February 11, 1934. New Stories (June-July 1934).

"The Visitor." Red Notebook, April 1934. Criterion (January 1935).

"Anagram" or "Mr. Tritas on the Roofs" ("The Orchards"). Red Notebook, October 1934. Criterion (1936).

"The Holy Six." Contemporary Poetry and Prose (Spring 1937).

"The Map of Love." Wales (Autumn 1937).

Source: Annis Pratt, pp. 211-212.

[10] Stith Thompson, "Myth and Folktales" in Myth: A Symposium, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 173.

[11] Dylan Thomas, Adventures in the Skin Trade and Other Stories (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 1955; 1969), p. 58. All subsequent mention of AST will refer to this edition.

[12] Pratt, p. 35.

[13] Pratt, p. 114.

[14] John Ackerman, Dylan Thomas: His Life and Work (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 101.

[15] Jeffrey Gantz, trans., The Mabinogion (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976), p. 243. All subsequent mention of Gantz will refer to this book.

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